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SUBJECT: MOLDOVA: WHEN VORONIN CALLED SMIRNOV

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) On Monday, April 7 the Presidential press office publicly confirmed that President Vladimir Voronin had telephoned Transnistrian (TN) leader Igor Smirnov earlier that day. This phone call, the first direct contact the two leaders have had in years, represents an historic breakthrough. According to media reports, the two men agreed to a bilateral meeting to discuss confidence-building measures proposed by Voronin.

SMIRNOV CONFIRMS CONTACT  
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12. (SBU) A press release from Smirnov, released several hours after Voronin's, confirmed the call and stated that "the TN side confirmed its readiness to continue consultations on the basis of equality of sides, refrain from any coercion measures and unilateral steps which harm regional stability. A draft treaty on friendship and cooperation between Moldova and TN, and the confidence building initiatives of the Moldovan side were addressed as possible subjects of discussion." The press release also noted that the Moldovan and TN chief negotiators, Minister of Reintegration Sova and TN "foreign minister" Litskai, were tasked with organizing the meeting.

RUSSIAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
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13. (SBU) According to press reports, Russian negotiator Nesterushkin commented that "a possible Voronin-Smirnov meeting provides cautious optimism, and expressed hope that it would push the process forward." Russian newspaper Kommersant, citing Russian Government sources, noted that Russia was actively pushing the sides to reach an agreement on a final settlement of the conflict in order "to teach the West a lesson on how to solve territorial conflicts." Kommersant noted that sources in the Russian presidential administration were quite optimistic about a possible settlement, and suggested that Russia was pushing for a solution that preserved Moldova's territorial integrity - as opposed to the West's support of Kosovo's independence.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: Given the deep animosity between both leaders, the telephone call (and the fact it was made public) was an important symbolic gesture. The call by Voronin was made at the urging of the Russians and shows his desire to move forward in the peace process even if it means taking the first steps towards a rapprochement. The timing is opportune for a bilateral meeting to discuss confidence building measures, providing good chances for the April 14 meeting in Odessa to generate positive results. We have heard (unconfirmed) reports that a Voronin-Smirnov meeting might take place as soon as this week. END COMMENT

KIRBY